

A FUNDAMENTAL KEY TO NEXT-GENERATION DIRECTED-ENERGY SYSTEMS

By Directed Energy Division, Electromagnetic and Sensor Systems Department

Imagine an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) unit on a routine scouting patrol deep in the notorious “Triangle of Death” south of Baghdad, where Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers frequently find themselves exposed to improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Fortunately, this newly outfitted unit is equipped with the latest unmanned, mobile, remote-controlled, radio frequency (RF) transmitter used as a directed-energy weapon (DEW). The integrated system provides comprehensive IED prediction, detection, prevention, and neutralization capabilities. Lightweight, pocket-sized transmitters carried by each warfighter constantly communicate sensor intelligence, key vital signs, critical conditions, and location telemetry to a geostationary satellite (GEOSAT). It intercepts, collects, and retransmits intelligence and situational awareness data simultaneously to any command post in the world and to each member of the unit on patrol. Highly efficient, miniature, switch-mode, RF amplifiers with high-power density (small size and weight with high-power output) enable these visions of future capabilities as their systems’ transmitter backbone.

To civilians, the miniaturization of modern wireless (electromagnetic) devices is considered a mere convenience or luxury, i.e., Blackberries, mobile phones, and high-speed wireless network connections. To the next-generation warfighter, miniaturized, wireless, directed-energy (DE) systems open the door to the realization of a whole new set of effective and efficient wireless modalities. And while the capabilities mentioned in the above scenario are not yet available to warfighters, researchers believe they have uncovered the key to next-generation DE systems leading to the miniaturization of DE devices.

NEXT-GENERATION DE SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

At the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD), key system requirements for effective next-generation DE systems are being researched and developed for applications to counter IEDs, to detect explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), to neutralize explosives, and to predict threat locations. Next-generation DE systems must yield a high probability of mission success and be inherently safe to operate. By design, they must minimize or eliminate the risk of hostile attack or collateral damage especially during screening missions. Considering the DEW example above, practical



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080102-N-1132M-006 SHEIK SA'ID, Iraq (2 January 2008) U.S. Army Soldiers attached to 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment patrol and search for weapons or Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) during a clearing mission. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sean Mulligan/Released)

next-generation DE systems must be physically characterized by:

- Low mass (weight)
- Small size (volume)
- High-power output with respect to size or high-power density
- High efficiency for extended mission use
- Minimized prime power and cooling support
- Portability
- Mobility
- Configurability

They must also ensure a high probability of mission effectiveness. The DEW must be easily transportable and agile, adapting to the immediate, local military mission requirements in various warfighting environments. Additionally, DE systems must be mechanically robust and able to withstand the shock and vibration of combat missions in rough and rugged environments. The key requirement—efficiency—fundamentally facilitates all required characteristics, including mass and size.

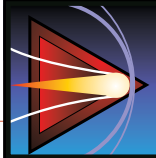
MOVING BEYOND REQUIREMENTS

Scientists at NSWCDD, sponsored by the Office of Naval Research (ONR), are researching and developing key system requirements for effective next-generation DE systems to counter IEDs, to

detect EFPs, to neutralize explosives, and to predict threat locations.

Researchers at NSWCDD are leading the way toward realizing small, lightweight, RF transmitters using high-power, solid-state, switch-mode amplifiers, theoretically 100 percent efficient. These practical switch-mode amplifier realizations are at least 1/100 the volume and weight of any commercially available linear solid-state amplifier of comparable power output. The challenges included assessing what type of active amplifier device and operation would provide the greatest power density (power output per unit volume and mass) with its necessary auxiliary systems, such as prime power generation and cooling of waste heat. Such a device also needed to provide sufficient output power based on required standoff range and IED system-coupling efficiency while also maintaining a manageably-sized, easily transportable system. Researchers initially considered tube-based systems, but large, heavy, direct-current (DC) power supplies are required, and typically 40 percent of the input power is dissipated in heat, which negates any possibility of miniaturization.

Upon a practical review of amplifier-class operations and suitable active amplifier devices, however, research pointed to contemporary switch-mode



amplifier schemes (e.g., Class-E and Class-F) using solid-state technology—such as the high-electron mobility transistor (HEMT)—as satisfying the high-power density and abusive mechanical requirements for expected worst-case transportation and operation in a rugged environment. To significantly impact reduction of size and weight, practical, high-efficiency thresholds were defined for next-generation DE systems at 90 percent and greater. The key technology enabler to realize amplifier high efficiency in high-power amplifiers up to 60 kW was found in exploiting contemporary switch-mode amplifier architecture with efficient power combining. Particularly, switch-mode schemes in Class-E and Class-F operation as solid-state, active-hybrid planar topology designs were found to be necessary and sufficient for DE applications. These analyses led to a novel, Class-E RF switch-mode amplifier design. A Class-E RF switch-mode amplifier can theoretically operate at 100-percent efficiency. For every input watt supplied, an RF output watt is produced. The conductors and dielectric substrate of the hybrid planar load network and the commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) transistor all exhibit some small degree of power loss, suggesting an estimated practically realized efficiency of 90 percent.

Moreover, the amplifier under research consisted of a novel microwave load network operating with high-power output at ultrahigh frequency (UHF). This research led to the state of the art in Class-E designs leading by hundreds of watts, several hundred megahertz in frequency, and roughly 10 percentage points in efficiency. A common, solid-state, high-power amplifier design technique sums the phase and amplitude of smaller amplifier units to the large values required for DE systems. A practical hardware limitation exists that limits the theoretically infinite number of fixed RF output power units to a finite number. Approximately 60-kW RF output power sets the boundary as the largest hardware realization. By applying spatial power combining in the propagating medium, phased-array antennas can be employed with constructive wave interference in air that would allow sufficient RF power densities on target, based on the number of elements in the array. This technique eliminates the traditional hardware necessary to power combine the smaller power-amplifier elements, realizing a much simplified DE system with enhanced power density in the transmitter, and reduced mass and volume.

The key to ultrahigh efficiency in a switch-mode amplifier, such as Class-E or Class-F, is found in zero-voltage switching (ZVS). Here, the load

network is not only designed to be resonant at and around a particular desired switching frequency, it must simultaneously act to force the voltage across the switch to be zero when current flows and when it switches off; hence, theory suggests that no power is dissipated because the product of current through, and voltage across, the switch is zero. It is this aspect of the design that makes the job of switch-mode amplifier realization difficult. Of course, in practice, a small voltage exists for a very short time during the switching action, resulting in a small amount of input power being dissipated in heat. This theoretical description also assumes that all components are ideal (i.e., no impedance to current flow exists in the switch when turned on). All realistic switches exhibit finite impedance when turned on, which does dissipate some wasted energy, but again, this is very small in modern HEMT devices using the ZVS technique.

Class-E switch-mode amplifier theory development began in the United States during the 1960s, with details published in 1975, although some earlier reports were published in Russia. Lumped element electrical components (RF choke inductors and metal film capacitors) were initially used in lower frequency (3 to 30 MHz) prototypes. As engineers attempted higher frequency designs in the very high frequency (VHF) range, solid-state transistor switch parasitic intrinsic and packaging elements found inside the transistor began to be used as some of the key components necessary for ZVS. These parasitic elements included stray capacitance caused by differences of potential between parts inside the transistor and inductance caused by bond wire length that is used to connect the transistor to accessible terminals in its packaging. At microwave frequencies, these parasitic elements become sensitive, invoking unintended significant changes to load networks designed to operate with the transistors. Intrinsic elements include drain-to-source breakdown voltage capability and peak current capability. As the need for higher frequency operation and higher power increased, constraints of key transistor parameters became difficult to produce in traditional silicon technology:

- High instantaneous transient (peak) current capability through the transistor
- Moderate breakdown potential across the transistor
- Low output capacitance

Only within the past few years have transistor manufacturers produced COTS transistors that meet the required capabilities necessary to operate in switch mode for microwave frequencies and



081107-N-1120L-072 RAMADI, Iraq (7 November 2008) Joint EOD Rapid Response Vehicles (JERRVs) assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 7's convoy security element are secured following an escort mission from a forward operating base. The Cougar-type JERRVs are employed by coalition forces for escort and logistics missions, and to protect personnel from IEDs. NMCB 7 is deployed to U.S. Forces Central Command to provide contingency construction support to coalition forces in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Michael B. Lavender/Released)

high-power output. Selection is still somewhat limited for designers.

New transistor technology known as gallium nitride (GaN) HEMTs—using state-of-the-art manufacturing processes with GaN on silicon carbide materials—now facilitates Class-E high-power amplifier (100-W) designs at ultrahigh frequencies. The design process for switch-mode amplifiers is radically different than linear amplifiers, so engineers have tended to continue using linear amplifier design techniques due to familiarity, rather than advance to the switch-mode designs. Today, the Class-E and Class-F unit power output (greater than 100 W) capability and upper frequency limitation is based on a lack of available HEMTs with the necessary parameter capabilities.

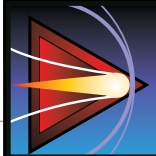
Most recently, transistor manufacturers have limited their investment in the Class-E amplifier solid-state switch market due to no commercial market mandate. An assortment of presently available HEMTs provides a low-power capability in terms of 1- to 10-W output power for Class-E amplifiers in the cell phone market. The need remains to continue

advancing in commercially manufactured HEMTs with key capabilities necessary to realize larger unit power output, hundreds of watts to a thousand watts, for practical implementation in DE systems.

POSSIBLE MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS

Directed-Energy Weapon Systems

Expanding on the vision of the next-generation DEW system mentioned at the beginning of this article, further imagine that EOD scouts detect a laser fluorescence signature of C4 high explosive and chlorine outgasses in the vicinity of an abandoned vehicle 2-km north of their current position. An electronic support measure (ESM) team on board an approaching clearing vehicle initiates RF jamming and electromagnetic surveillance procedures. Electronic specialists also scan the area with ground-surface differential thermography—particularly to detect possible buried IEDs and EFPs or their tiny command wires, crush wires, or pressure plates—while clearing a pathway to the abandoned roadside vehicle.



Upon arrival at a 500-m safe distance, the EOD specialists command the RF transmitter's robotic platform, also equipped with sensitive gamma-ray planar and computed tomography (CT) imaging to navigate toward and around the vehicle, interrogating every possible hiding place. It discloses an IED in the fuel tank. The specialist lifts the transmitter arming safety and commands the remote transmitter to radiate a prescribed dose of RF energy directed at a carefully chosen component of the vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) system. Without entering the vehicle, the advanced screening system detects and defuses the deadly IED buried within the rusty, metal vehicle chassis. Within minutes, the suspected VBIED threat is entirely neutralized, with absolutely no wounded warfighters or casualties.



Pictured here is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NASA/NOAA) Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite-P (GOES-P) launching from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida, aboard a Delta IV rocket procured by Boeing Launch Services on 4 March 2010. Built by Boeing Space and Intelligence Systems, GOES-P will provide NOAA and NASA scientists with data to support weather, solar, and space operations, and will enable future science improvements in weather prediction and remote sensing. Additionally, GOES-P will provide data on global climate changes and capability for search and rescue.

Mobile Ad-Hoc Wireless Network (MANET)

Beyond IED detection and neutralization, imagine an expeditionary unit on patrol, with each member equipped with an RF transceiver about the size and weight of a cigarette pack with an ultrahigh-efficient switch-mode amplifier. The miniature transceiver constantly communicates sensor intelligence, key vital signs, critical conditions, and location telemetry to a GEOSAT. This small switch-mode amplifier has the needed output power to reach an altitude of 35786 km, where the GEOSAT intercepts, collects, and retransmits this intelligence and situational awareness data to any command post in the world and to each member of the unit on patrol simultaneously. The expeditionary unit, spread out over a wide area with large interspacing, shares the situational awareness and intelligence data of each other at the speed of light. Thus, near real-time, worldwide communications with ubiquitous secure access from the battlefield is possible in a multiple-input, multiple-output (MIMO) architecture. The same system could provide a soldier-to-soldier MANET.

Next-generation switch-mode RF amplifier designs could also optimize payload weight and volume on board new communication satellites while supplying higher power density and making efficient use of the solar power supply budget. Improved switch-mode amplifier power output, when combined with enhanced antenna design, would minimize Earth-station antenna size requirements. The recently launched satellite shown at left demonstrates an example of the latest antenna technology.

LOOKING FORWARD

Miniaturizing next-generation DE systems opens up a whole new world of applications to support warfighters in ways unimaginable just a few years ago. Reduction of transmitter mass and volume, accompanied with high efficiency, creates a welcome trickle-down effect. Low profile, small, lightweight DE systems means:

- Less vulnerability to attack
- Greater mobility and maneuverability
- Simplified logistics with less fuel-supply demands
- Less impact on the environment

Clandestine operations, too, could be executed with greater ease and simplified logistics support. In the case of MIMO MANETs, miniaturized high-power density transmitters could further expand capabilities for the warfighter, enabling them to carry high-power transmitters to communicate with satellites or other supporting platforms. The

satellite industry itself could benefit from miniaturized switch-mode amplifiers with much higher power density microwave transmitters, resulting in reduced payload mass and volume; this also reduces Earth-station antenna gain and size requirements.

CONCLUSION

NSWCDD is meeting the demanding requirements of next-generation DE systems with Class-E RF transmitter switch-mode amplifiers designed to operate at ultrahigh efficiency, greater than 90 percent. Having discovered the key to next-generation DE systems, researchers at NSWCDD are focusing on the urgent need to counter IED systems with small, lightweight, highly efficient transmitters that use switch-mode amplifiers. Considering the multiplicity of additional applications, all advancements made in amplifier counter-IED applications can be transferred to other applications in the future. Accordingly, while the capabilities suggested in this article might seem somewhat far-fetched, in reality, they are realizable in the near term. It is projected that NSWCDD will soon have its first 250-W UHF amplifier unit prototype ready. These units will fit in the palm of an average-sized adult's hand and can be power combined to the level necessary for platform and mission requirements. A fully realized, fieldable DEW system prototype is possible in just a few years.

